

A Statement on Racism and Actions of Justice from
the Session of Irvington Presbyterian Church
September 29, 2020

“To do righteousness and justice is more acceptable to the Lord than sacrifice.”

— Proverbs 21:3

“God sends the Church to work for justice in the world: exercising its power for the common good; dealing honestly in personal and public spheres; seeking dignity and freedom for all people...”

— Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Book of Order, W-5.0304

The Session of Irvington Presbyterian Church trusts scripture to proclaim God’s intention for the world. Part of this intention is to build a world of justice, fairness and love among God’s people. The Session also trusts the church to lead the way in guiding people to live with integrity in following God’s call.

Therefore, the Session of Irvington Presbyterian Church affirms the following statement of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), written in “Facing Racism: A Vision of the Intercultural Community”, the PC(USA) Churchwide Antiracism Policy, first adopted in 1999 and revised in 2016.

We affirm this statement:

“While recognizing that racism victimizes many different racial ethnic groups, we acknowledge its unique impact on the African American community. Given the particular forms that anti-Black racism has taken in the United States of America both historically (including slavery and Jim Crow) and today (including mass incarceration, disproportionate policing, economic inequality, and continuing acts of racially oriented violence and hate), we state clearly: GOD LOVES BLACKNESS. Too many have denied this basic truth for too long. Our choice to align ourselves with love and not hate requires both a rejection of racism and a positive proclamation that God delights in Black lives.”

Additionally, the Session agrees with the interpretation of the PC(USA) in regards to the phrase “Black Lives Matter”:

Saying unequivocally that “Black Lives Matter” in no way means that all lives do not matter. It is rather an acknowledgment that many lives – specifically Black lives – are systemically devalued. As a community that tries to follow Jesus, we proclaim that such a devaluation of our siblings is an affront to the Living God. The Confession of Belhar reminds us “that God, in a world full of injustice and enmity, is in a special way the God of the destitute, the poor and the wronged.” Specificity toward Black lives is necessary, particularly in this moment, so that we may acknowledge and address the inequities that prevent the whole community from living as if all lives matter.

Neither the Session of Irvington Presbyterian Church nor the PC(USA) has any affiliation with the Black Lives Matter movement or organization. However, the Session does:

- **Believe that black lives matter;**
- **Stand against violence in any form that destroys property and/or brings violence among people;¹**
- **Stand with law enforcement officers when they “serve and protect” people of all races with integrity and fairness;**
- **Seek peaceful reconciliation between those who seek justice and those who administer justice in our country.**

The Session also calls itself and the congregation of Irvington Presbyterian Church to act boldly in ways that begin to dismantle the systemic racism inherent in our own ministry.² Therefore, Session will:

- **Require our committees and task groups to consider racial issues in their ministries, and act to eliminate discrimination wherever it is found in them;**
- **Study, pray and act in ways that acknowledge white privilege while working toward equality for all;**
- **Consider minority contractors when seeking work done at the church, as well as minority vendors and suppliers for other needs of the church;**
- **Appoint a Session Racial Justice Advocate to ensure that the Session is accountable to itself and the congregation.³**

The Session understands that racial justice is a demand of scripture and an undeniable call of God. It also understands its own inadequacy in following this call. And so, the Session prays for the guidance of the Holy Spirit in leading the congregation, with care and grace, toward a time when all of God’s people might enjoy a world where peace and love is the prospect for everyone.

¹ Session deplores the violence against people and property caused by looting, rioting and mob action.

² Inherent racism can be found in our ministries when we realize how few people of color are in our membership compared with our quite diverse neighborhood, in our neglect in teaching and preaching how the Christian church has, at times, accepted and even endorsed racism and segregation (even in our own Irvington community), not presenting the voice of people of color in our Christian education, etc.

³ Session has not yet determined whether this Racial Justice Advocate will be a member of Session or ex-officio member.